



FAVORITE POEM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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Ten New Favorite Poem Videos: FPP Comes Home to Boston University

Over the past year, working with the BU Office of the Provost, the BU Arts Initiative, and BU Today, we have finally been able to bring our work home to our own community with ten new videos of staff, faculty, students, and distinguished visitors to BU's campus reading poems they love. This fall, we hosted a screening on campus to share our new videos with the public. Check out [coverage of the event](#) on BU Today. Videos include Whitman in Mandarin, Elizabeth Bishop in Portuguese, and many other wonderful connections to poetry in our university community.



A Note From Robert Pinsky

With a new series of BU videos made by Devin Hahn and Roberto Mighty, the FPP under director Laura Marris enters an exciting new phase. We are enhancing our website with particular attention to the needs of students and teachers at every grade level, and integrating the videos from our Massive Open Online Course "[The Art of Poetry](#)" into the FPP. The art of poetry itself mediates between the individual voice and its inheritance, each person and a larger world, inheritance and future. The FPP will keep on reflecting those large matters the best we can, and Laura and I want the newsletter to encourage suggestions and participation from those who read it.

With shared enthusiasm,





Featured FPP Video

For this issue of the newsletter, we have chosen to feature Mary Jane Doherty's reading of "The Snow Man" by Wallace Stevens. We invite you to visit favoritepoem.org and explore the full collection of videos.



From the Archives

Recognize anyone? This photo comes from the first FPP reading at the Fine Arts Work Center, featuring Stanley Kunitz, Louise Glück, Carl Phillips, Maggie Dietz, Robert Pinsky, and Frank Bidart.



Favorite Poem Project at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown

We're grateful to all the writers and performers who participated in the FPP Reading at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA this August. Readers included **André Gregory, Ross Gay, Eileen Miles, Patty Larkin, Tony Kushner, Vievee Francis, Nick Flynn, Cornelius Eady, Gail Mazur, Jay Allison** and others.



Seeking Your Favorite Poetry Lesson Plans

Do you have favorite lesson plans for poetry, either from our Summer Poetry Institute or that you've developed on your own? We are expanding the "for teachers" section of our website with new lesson plans, and we would love to feature your teaching! Send us an email at fpp@bu.edu. We'd also love to hear any feedback you might have about the changes to our website and what would be useful to you in your classroom. And thanks for sending us the results of your favorite poem readings and assignments! We're always happy to see them.



White House

On April 22, 1998, President and Mrs. Clinton hosted U.S. poet laureate Robert Pinsky and former poets laureate Robert Hass and Rita Dove at the White House to celebrate America's rich heritage of poetry.



New York

Braving a torrential storm, more than 1,200 people packed New York City's Town Hall for the official launch of the Favorite Poem Project.



Washington, DC

The day after the New York event, Robert Pinsky headed to D.C. for an event hosted by the Library of Congress, his Laureate home.



Boston

Twenty-five Bostonians—including the President of the Massachusetts State Senate, a homeless Boston resident and a third-grader—read favorite poems to a full house at the Boston Public Library on April 8.



St. Louis

St. Louis Late in the month, Robert Pinsky visited middle America for the fourth Favorite Poem launch event. On April 25, St. Louis residents spent a Saturday afternoon at Washington University listening to their city's favorite poems.



Los Angeles

On a balmy California Sunday, hundreds of people gathered outdoors for the final Favorite Poem event during National Poetry Month.

Interview with an Educator: Naomi Mulvihill

Elementary School Teacher at Sarah Greenwood School in Dorchester, MA, a bilingual Spanish/English school.

How did you come to poetry?

I've taught bilingual for seventeen years, and kids gravitate to real poetry, they feel the power of it, and so the reading of poems and oral expression of poems, they feel the joy of it, and they feel it in their bodies, and they're eager to also make up their own poems. So I've always used poems, everyday.

Did you have an early experience with poetry? Do you remember the first poem that really spoke to you as a kid?

No, we had to read "The Road Not Taken" at some point, and it was very teacher driven, very uninteresting. And I thought poetry was kind of baloney, I thought it was contrived. And in high school the same thing happened again. And then one of my sisters, who did do well in school, one of them left the book *Sister Outsider* when she was already in college and I was just finishing high school. And I picked it up and I was like, wow, this is really great. After high school I read some Sylvia Plath. By then I was so moved by poetry, that it was almost impossible to imagine the world without it. So for kids, too, I always wanted them to not have me interfering with their experience of [poetry], for me to just find something that was really riveting and really exciting. For example, we read Langston Hughes' poems in kindergarten. But I try not to interfere too much. I just ask them what they notice.

Where do you find the poems you like to use? Do you have places you like to go?

When I first started, there weren't all these websites, so I started making an anthology, just for very practical purposes of having them together and sharing them with colleagues. When I did my second masters', as part of a course, I decided to make an anthology that our school could use. So it was in Spanish and English, and I'm still adding to it. The key is just to choose really exciting poems. Don't try to teach phonics with poems. And don't get jingles for poems. And don't try to match poems to your themes in science.

How do you work with poems in both languages?

Next year I'll be teaching only in Spanish, so I'll do poetry in Spanish. The way this program is structured, it's really immersion, so 80% of the time is in Spanish, so basically, you're learning your literacy in Spanish, whether that's your first language or not. So then half of the kids are coming in to the poem purely through sound. So if you select things thoughtfully, there are lots of places where the poem will go, but the sound is enough to carry it, to get kids deeply engaged, so that they'll stick with a poem even when they are in the earliest stages of the language. It's amazing.

How did you find the Favorite Poem Project?

I was a fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, and they were having an event, and Robert was there. And he asked if we knew about the website.

Any words of wisdom for other teachers?

If teachers can think really hard about allowing children to experience the poems, and let different children read the poems in their voices, read the poems chorally every day, rather than have any sort of agenda about what kids should find in the poems or trying to lead them to any particular place. If you do poetry every day, all the time, the poetry will carry the discourse, and it will lead the kids into profound questions about language. People always make it so quick—we're going to do a poetry unit, and it's going to be three weeks, and it's not enough time to just experience it.

Do you know what it was that first made the shift from poetry being baloney to something really moving?

I think that it was Audre Lorde's *Undersong: Chosen Poems, Old and New*. A few poems in there made me realize that language was so capable of uncovering things, rather than a coverup, or slight of hand moves, and that was exciting.